

When will I start my period?

"When is it going to happen?"

Everybody's different. People have their own personal time clocks. Some people start their periods as early as age 9. Others don't start until age 16.

There's no way to know for sure when you'll start, but there are clues. When did your mother start having a period? When did other close family members (siblings, cousins) start? You'll probably start at about the same age.

Have you noticed other signs of puberty? Have your breasts started growing? Do you have pubic hair? These are signs that your body is getting ready and you'll probably start your period in the next year or so.

"How will I know when I start my period? What does it feel like?"

Your first sign will probably be a few spots of blood on your underwear. Or you may notice a feeling of wetness. But the bleeding itself doesn't hurt.

Some people have cramps, or pain in the abdomen, the first day or two. Cramps can be uncomfortable, but they go away.

You may feel a little tired and grumpy the first day. Some people may feel a little bloated or swollen. These feelings go away too.

You may think you're losing a lot of blood, but you aren't. Only about 4-8 tablespoons of fluid leave the uterus during your period.

"I started my periods a year ago, but I haven't had one for 2 months. Is something wrong?"

It's common for periods to be unpredictable when you first start to have them. Many people skip a few periods the first year or so after they start.

After a while, your body will settle into a pattern that will become familiar to you. If you don't have a period for 6 months, check in with your doctor.



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What should I do?

"What if I'm not home when I start?"

Sometimes people worry that blood will gush out. But periods usually begin slowly, with only a few drops of blood. You'll have time to get a pad.

If you think you might start your period because of how your body feels or because of how long it's been since your last period, carry a pad or tampon with you in your purse or backpack. Carry some change, too. Some public restrooms have vending machines that sell pads or tampons.

If you start at school, you can ask the nurse or other trusted adult to help you. And don't be shy about asking someone if they have a pad or tampon you could have. People are happy to help.

"Should I use pads or tampons or cups?"

Many people try out different products to decide which ones they prefer. You may want to talk about it with your mother or other family members or friends you trust. You can find out about different brands and styles available.

Pads are worn on the inside of your underwear. They absorb the blood as it leaves your vagina. Tampons and reusable cups are worn inside your vagina. They catch the blood before it leaves your body.

All these products come in different sizes and styles to handle different flows and body shapes.

"How often should I change my pad or tampon or cup?"

How often you change depends on your flow. Check the package for information about how to use the product, but usually you'll change about every 3-4 hours. Changing regularly will keep the blood from getting on your clothes.

If you use disposable products such as pads or tampons, be sure to throw them away after you use them. Don't flush a used pad or tampon down the toilet.

Having a period is normal! It means your body is growing up. You can still do all the things you love to do – sports, swimming, dancing!



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What is a period?

You'll notice a lot of changes as you go through puberty.

- You grow taller.
- Your body grows hair under your arms and around your genitals.
- Your breasts develop.
- You begin to have periods, or menstruate.



When you menstruate, blood and fluid leaves your body through the vagina. This happens about once a month. A period usually lasts about 3-7 days.

Why do people have periods?

Periods are part of a process in which the lining of the uterus thickens and gets ready for a possible pregnancy. The whole process is called a menstrual cycle.

1 Day 1 of the cycle is the first day of your period. You're not pregnant — so the lining of the uterus leaves your body through the vagina. Periods last about 3-7 days.

2 Right after you finish your period, the lining of the uterus starts to get thicker again. At the same time, an egg ripens in one of your ovaries. This can take 6-12 days or more.

3 The ripe egg pops out of the ovary into the fallopian tube and begins to travel toward the uterus. This is called *ovulation* and it happens about 13-15 days before your next period.

4 Sometimes a sperm enters an egg while it's in the fallopian tube. This is called *fertilization*.

5 If a fertilized egg moves into the uterus and attaches to the thick lining, you are *pregnant*.

6 But during most cycles, the egg isn't fertilized and the lining of the uterus leaves your body. The cycle starts again.

Cycles can be many different lengths. Some are as short as 22 days. Others are as long as 40 days. The length of your cycle may change a little from month to month. Everybody is different.

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Period facts



Professional models were used in all photos.
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Your Period. *Go with the flow.*

Should I keep track?

Cycles can be many different lengths. Some are as short as 22 days. Others are as long as 40 days. The length of your cycle may change a little from month to month. Everybody is different.

You may find it helpful to keep track of your period so you can get to know your own body and learn about your own natural cycle.

When you first start your periods, they might not be regular. But you'll likely see a pattern develop over time. Keeping track will help you predict when your next period will start.

How do I keep track of my period?

One way to keep track is to use a calendar. You can mark the first day of your period with an X or some other symbol. You can do this with a print calendar or with an online calendar.

And there are some fun apps available for mobile devices that will keep track of your cycles and your period history. Check out Spot On, a free app from Planned Parenthood.



Tracking your period helps you learn about and predict your cycle.

What do I need to use?

There are so many products available in stores and online, you might feel overwhelmed trying to choose. Find a trusted adult or friend you feel comfortable talking with.

Many people try out different products in order to decide which ones work the best for them. You may decide to use different products depending on your flow—usually periods start out light, then get a little heavier, then get light again before they end.



Disposable products



These are pads and tampons that you use once and then throw away. There are small, medium, large and extra-large sizes. The packages will include instructions.

Some pads are super absorbent and designed to wear overnight. Some pads are called panty liners—they're very thin, for when your flow is light or for the days before your period starts. Some pads are designed with "wings" or flaps that protect your underwear and clothes.

Tampons also come in different sizes. Some come with applicators designed to make it easier to insert them in your vagina. Others come without applicators and you insert them by using your fingers.



Reusable or renewable products



There are pads and cups that you use, clean and then use again. There are a lot of these products and the packages will include instructions on cleaning and using them.

Cloth pads come in different sizes and can be worn just like disposable pads. But instead of throwing them away, you rinse them out in the sink and then wash them and use them again. They can be very comfortable and some come in fun designs and colors.

Reusable cups are small silicone cups made to be worn inside your vagina. When you insert them, they form a seal and collect all the blood and fluid. After several hours you pull the cup out using your fingertips, empty it in a toilet or sink, wash it out and reinsert it. The cups are easy to clean and store.

What if I get cramps?

Some people get cramps the first day or two of their periods. These can be dull, achy pains in the abdomen. Or they can be sharp and painful. However, most cramps are mild.

You can try several things to relieve cramps:

- Rest with a heating pad or hot water bottle on your abdomen.
- Take a nonaspirin pain reliever.
- Learn some exercises that can relieve cramps. Many yoga postures are helpful. Regular exercise seems to help prevent cramps.
- Get enough sleep, drink water and eat healthy fruits and vegetables, lean protein and whole grains.

Once in a while, cramps are severe. If this happens to you for several months in a row, see your doctor.



Gentle and restorative yoga poses can help ease the discomfort of cramps.

What is Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)?

Some people feel uncomfortable before they begin their periods. They may feel tired and achy. They may feel emotional or sad.

You can help PMS problems in several ways:

- Cut down on salt and added sugar.
- Avoid caffeine—coffee, tea, cola drinks and chocolate.
- Try to relax and get enough rest.
- Be physically active!

What is Toxic Shock Syndrome? This is a very rare disease that has been connected to using tampons. Symptoms are a high fever, vomiting, diarrhea, feeling light-headed, aching muscles, headaches and a rash that looks like a sunburn.

If you have any of these symptoms while using a tampon, take it out. See your doctor right away. You can make using tampons safer by choosing the smallest size that will work for you.